

AUGUSTA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN UPDATE

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY

Purpose

The Augusta Richmond Planning Commission is recognized as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the urbanized areas of Aiken County, Richmond County, and Columbia County. This commission provides staffing to oversee the development of all regional transportation studies and initiatives, commonly referred to as ARTS. ARTS is in the process of updating the current regional bicycle plan to guide future bicycle and pedestrian investments in the metropolitan planning region. This update includes gaining an understanding of existing conditions and routes currently being used within the entire region, identifying routes that will create a connected network of both bicycle and pedestrian facilities linking major destinations, and prioritizing future projects based on regional needs and desires. The resulting document will be a phased action plan with specific policies, strategies, and projects with cost estimates and identified funding opportunities.

Public involvement ensures that the public is a partner in the process of determining strategies to be undertaken by a government entity where there are multiple and competing needs. A Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is a framework for all activities taken to involve the public in this update from development of goals and objectives to the selection of projects. The purpose of this PIP is to create a Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that meets region-wide needs and is supported by the community.

In addition, federal regulations mandate that MPOs include a certain level of public involvement in the development of long-range transportation plans. The following federal regulations will provide guidance to this plan: National Environmental Policy Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Encouraging active community participation during plan development is the ultimate goal of this PIP. The initial step is creating trust between the stakeholders and the agency responsible for making the final decisions. This trust can be built through coordination with stakeholders as well as outreach and involvement. A proper forum can identify the most important issues and can lead to a solution everyone supports. The following PIP is designed to take the public beyond information and engage them in the discussion of this study.

The following outlines specific activities to be undertaken during plan development, including coordination, outreach, involvement, and evaluation. Some of these activities are to be conducted by Augusta Richmond Planning Commission staff and/or Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee members (see below). ARCADIS will complete the remaining tasks.

Coordination

The Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should build upon existing local bicycle and pedestrian planning and public involvement efforts to ensure a regionally coordinated and comprehensive plan. Existing activities include the ARTS Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) oversight, local jurisdiction planning initiatives such as corridor plans, redevelopment plans, land use plans, and transportation plans, as well as local bicycle and pedestrian group activities.

Citizen Advisory Committee

The CAC provides guidance on all ARTS initiatives. Its role is to provide citizen input on all aspects of the planning processes. The CAC will be involved throughout the planning process by providing input into the development of the final PIP and reviewing periodic summaries of current public involvement activities. Consultants will prepare the periodic summaries for submission by ARTS staff to the CAC.

Jurisdictional Initiatives

Several jurisdictions within the region have already initiated projects with public involvement activities that could impact the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. As part of this PIP, these projects and proposed public involvement activities will be reviewed to ensure the maximum exposure possible for the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The consultant team will review these projects for possible joint public involvement ventures. Every effort will be made to coordinate outreach activities with existing community forums, such as long- and short-range transportation plan public meetings, comprehensive plan public meetings, or recreational program meetings. ARCADIS will develop stand-alone display boards for use with identified activities.

Local Bicycle and Pedestrian Group Programs

The consultant team will create a presentation package providing information about the project, scope, timelines, and events. ARTS staff and Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee members will be asked to present the information to local bicycle and pedestrian and recreational groups to provide an information link, as well as to highlight opportunities for involvement.

Outreach

Outreach will include ongoing notification (newsletters and websites) of all events related to the study, community forum displays, informational magnets, and media outreach. The desired result of all outreach activities is to provide the community segment interested in bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the region with the knowledge and education necessary for informed involvement. The consultant team will develop all outreach materials for distribution.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Newsletter

Newsletters highlighting opportunities for public involvement and information will be developed at key milestones of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, including goal and objective development, evaluation criteria selection, project identification, and final plan development. The purpose of the newsletter is to raise awareness of the plan through existing community and organizational group networks. The newsletters will be distributed to community and organizational groups and Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee members. The newsletter will also be posted on the ARTS website (see below).

Web Site Updates

ARCADIS will provide the planning process, project schedule, and timely updates of the bicycle and pedestrian plan for the Augusta-Richmond Planning Commission website. This will provide citizens and stakeholders with a method to stay up to date on the plan's progress. It is anticipated that the final Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and each implementation success will be posted on the website to encourage continued awareness and interest in the plan.

Media Outreach

In order to reach the largest segment of the general public as possible, the project team will provide the ARTS with necessary materials for contacting the local and regional media to discuss the project and outline the upcoming activities. Press releases and articles will be provided to staff for distribution to the identified media outlets.

Display Boards

Two stand-alone display boards highlighting information about the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will be prepared by the consultant for staff use at community meetings, festivals, schools, etc. Display boards will be updated throughout the planning process to provide the most current information available.

Collateral Materials

ARCADIS will develop customized magnets and bookmarks to be distributed through the Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee members, local libraries, and bicycle shops. The magnets will be designed to introduce the project and generate interest. The magnet will direct interested parties to sources for more information (website). The bookmarks will provide information relating to future community meetings and provide telephone numbers for additional information.

Involvement

Involvement of the community will be sought through a Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee, planned public meetings, and surveys distributed intermittently through the process. The desired result of this segment of the PIP is to provide a means for everyone interested in the project to provide comments during all stages of the project.

Bike and Pedestrian Steering Committee

A Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee, consisting of local government representatives, nonprofit representatives, and private sector organizations, will be created to assist in the development of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and implementation of the PIP. ARTS staff will develop the list of stakeholder members with input from the consultants. All aspects of the update, as well as the PIP, will be coordinated and approved by this steering committee. Committee members will be asked to attend five structured and facilitated meetings during the planning process to provide the necessary guidance.

The initial meeting will include an introduction to the project and a question and answer session. The stakeholders will participate in a facilitated exercise to identify issues and opportunities they see within the region regarding bicycle and pedestrian planning.

A second meeting will be held in conjunction with the first public meeting (see below) during the background research phase of the project. Stakeholders will be asked to identify origin and destination points within the study area and will assist in the development of draft goals and objectives for the plan.

A third meeting will be held toward the end of the existing conditions analysis. The objective of the third meeting is to identify strategies and evaluation criteria. Stakeholders will be asked to prioritize draft strategies and determine data needs for evaluation criteria.

A fourth meeting will be a facilitated workshop with the purpose of reviewing design standards and identifying and selecting projects to meet the goals and objectives of the plan. This meeting will be held during the development of the draft plan and alternatives analysis phase.

Public Meetings

Public meetings are critical and necessary mechanisms for involving the general public in the planning process. Two community meeting dates are planned at key points to solicit valuable public input. The first meeting date will take place early in the project to provide information to the public regarding the scope of the plan; to gather input on issues and perceived problems in the bicycle and pedestrian system, origins, and destinations; and to review draft goals and objectives. The second meeting date will be held during the identification and selection of project phase and will emphasize consensus building exercises to finalize goals and objectives and to prioritize projects for inclusion into the plan. Several community meetings will occur throughout the region on the meeting dates

to provide regional accessibility to the general public. The consultant team will attend the community meetings and provide all display materials, including displays that help portray the project efforts and accurately frame input and involvement opportunities.

Surveys

Two surveys will be developed by ARCADIS with assistance from the project team to elicit pertinent information. The first survey will be held during the background research phase and will be designed to determine origin and destination points throughout the region and concerns for bicycle and pedestrian needs. The second survey will be designed to gather specific bicycle and pedestrian needs region wide and will be held during the project selection phase of the study. These surveys will be distributed through the Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee and via the website.

Measures of Effectiveness

A combination of quantitative and qualitative measures will be used to evaluate public involvement activities. Quantitative measures are useful in providing information concerning type and level of involvement. Qualitative measures are useful in determining the level of change that has occurred regarding education and awareness of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and the quality of response to this involvement. In turn, this information can be used to update the type of public involvement tools used.

Evaluation surveys will be provided at each of the stakeholder and community meetings to gather input regarding the quality of each public involvement activity. In addition, the following information will be collected throughout the planning process in an effort to provide the necessary information to the CAC and Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of public involvement activities throughout the process.

Measures

- Type and number of opportunities for public involvement
- Type and number of outlets for plan information
- Number of information requests concerning bicycle and pedestrian improvements
- Attendance at public meetings
- Plan changes due to public comments

ARCADIS will revisit the public involvement plan based on findings from the CAC and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee and input from the evaluation surveys and will make changes as necessary to make the most effective use of project team time and public involvement tools.